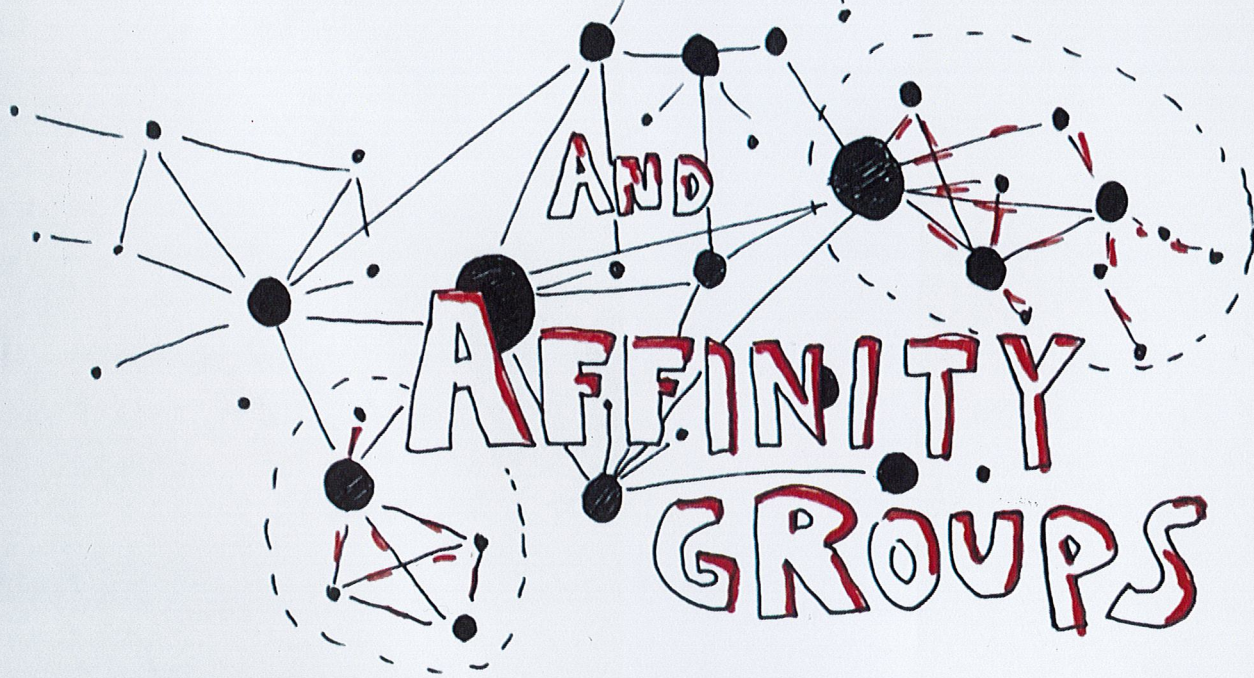
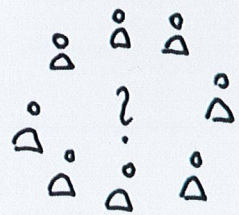


# UNDERSTANDING NETWORKS



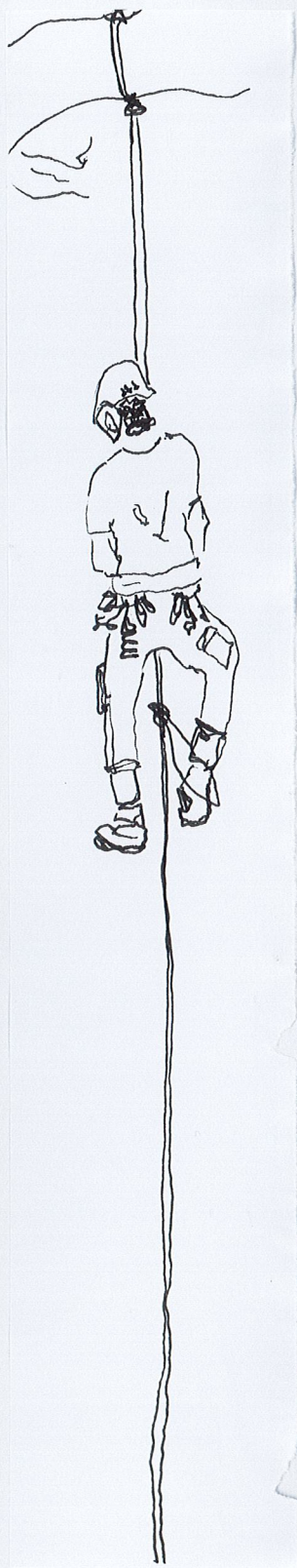
IN

SOCIAL



MOVEMENTS







## Introduction

The world is a small place. Have you ever heard of the fact that we are separated by any random person by only six people in between? This is actually half true (1,2). Well the world of forest occupation activism is an even smaller place it seems like. Through some people everybody seems to be connected to each other. Think about it for a second: How far are you from Greta Thunberg? Even if you do not do anything with Fridays for Future, you probably know someone, who knows someone and if you repeat this step a couple of times you find someone who knows Greta. The argument is not about that Greta is so cool, but that people like this usually seem very far. We have a fairly good idea about how many people we are in contact with, and maybe even if our contacts have contact with each other, but it is almost impossible to have an idea of how far people are from each other on average, or how many of the possible connections between people actually exist. Still, these things are incredibly important for the way our movements work (or don't work). If we are all very densely connected and distances are short, information can reach everyone way quicker. If my friends can also reach each other when I am not available for some time, it makes everything a lot easier, and also takes some stress off my shoulders. We try (and often fail) to build movements without formal hierarchies or even formal structures, especially when our groups become bigger. This makes it even harder to know something about the structure of how we work together on a larger scheme. If we want to understand how we work together and potentially find out more about the "hidden" hierarchies of knowledge and power (for example who is in the center of communication), it makes sense to look at the groups that we work in as networks of individuals (called nodes) that have connections between them (called edges). This perspective can also help us to understand how we adapt (and how we could adapt) the structure of how we work together on our campaigns, in our occupations or our broader movement.

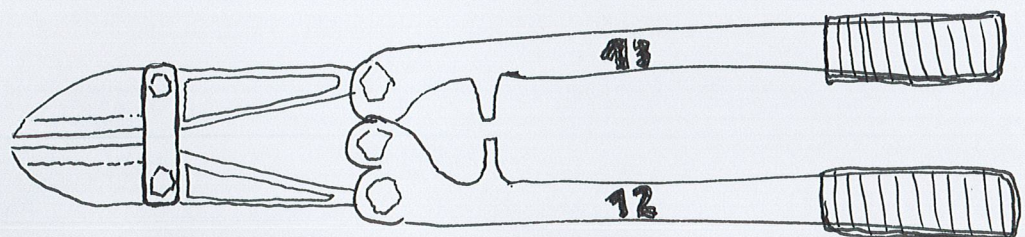
Since March/April 2023 I have worked with a collective that wants to protect a park from being destroyed. This collective is in a way a really typical one for the European movements I am familiar with: some anarchist organising, ecological ideas, mostly young, white people with (university) education and an interest in conserving nature. I did political organising with them and for six months also took a deep dive into the way they organised by both talking to people and developing a narrative, but also by collecting data on who



interacted with who, to build a network and learn more about the structure of their work and how it changes over time. In this zine, I will

1. tell the story of the park (from the perspective of another organiser)
2. give some insights into networks (without too much math)
3. give some insights into social movements (as networks)
4. and show how and why the structure of their network changes when the campaign changes
5. to share some of my personal take aways for organising in networked movements.

I would like to be very clear that I am in the privileged position to have gone to university. Even more so, I had the freedom to basically learn about whatever I wanted and had very little issue with financial insecurities because of basic financial support and paid work on the side. I have organised in a social center/skatepark since I was a teenager and after school had a journey through a lot of different forms of organising, including the youth wing of a political party, volunteering for different NGOs and in a neighbourhood garden, but also more anarchist forms of organising like an action climbing collective or forest occupations. This zine is very subjective because it is about topics that I find interesting and things that I noticed in movements. Science is also a subjective game and there is no universal truth in any of this. When I am using scientific concepts or theories, I am trying to make an argument or explain something. You are very free to disagree and tell me science is an ivory tower, financed by the state, not truly independent, and produces elitist bullshit that is completely detached from reality. I am not here to argue. Science is a predominantly white, rich game that is shaped by and reproduces ways of organising society that many of us hate. I am here to give my perspective on how we can use some of the ideas in science to understand better what we are doing and to confront our own biases, stereotypes and blind spots. I do not want to tell anyone that this way of organising is right or wrong or that the way I analyse and reflect on the things in this collective is the best, it is just what I have done and how I thought it was good when I started the process. If you think differently that is great and I would be happy to talk about it when you find me somewhere.





## History of the Park

I looked at a network of initiatives that are concerned with protecting a park, that should to be demolished for the building of a new supermarket, including the cutting of about thirty trees to make way for the car park or the supermarket. The initial project was presented to the local residents in 2022 and a lot of people got pretty angry. Some of the initiatives in the network were founded just to protect the park and others are ecological and political initiatives that have broader ambitions and goals, but mobilised part of their resources for the protection of the park. Among these are local of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Fridays for Future (FFF). There was also student group Political Ecology (PE) and a self-directed cultural laboratory that is active in many projects locally.

When asked about the history of the struggle to save the park, knowing that the building permit was issued in 2022, one local resident and activist told me that a story about the struggle to save the park needs to start with the G8 summit in Genoa, which in his opinion politicised and radicalised a whole generation. The 2001 G8 summit in Genoa is one of the high-points of the anti-globalisation movement, where more than 200,000 protesters came together. It was also characterised by massive human rights violations against protesters. It became famous for the vicious beating of peaceful protesters the night before the summit started, where the police broke into a school and beat dozens of protesters until they were unconscious. It also became famous for the police shooting a peaceful protestor, later claiming they shot into the sky and a rock that the protestors threw deflected the bullet, which killed the protester (no joke).

Two important places around the park are the two social centres. One of them is a legalised squat with study areas for students, meeting places, a bar and art exhibitions, the other one is an occupied school, with a gym, cinema, spaces for different collectives and living spaces. Both of these places are extremely important for the movement, because they help get people politically involved, radicalise them and provide a lot of infrastructure.

The explicit starting point to save the park, was in 2022, when the plans for the supermarket were made public and explicitly included the demolition of the legalised social centre next to the park. Initially the campaign was limited to a group of individuals who were active in the social centre or used it to study. This does not mean it was small though. This 'limited' group of people included multiple hundreds in the first meetings because the social centre was so popular with students. This group managed to negotiate the first big win of the campaign in May 2022, when they convinced the municipality to change the construction plan to save the center. Many were satisfied with this, but a



group of about twenty individuals decided that it was not enough, because it did not save the park. They wanted to fight for the park because they were aware of the the value of the park for the neighbourhood, the health of the residents, and the value of trees and grass over asphalt and concrete in an urban ecosystem, already severely affected by climate change.

This change also led to a more diverse group: local residents, activists from the occupied social centre and students. One of the initial organisers of this group highlighted that a large majority of these individuals, some of which were friends studying together at the social centre since three years, are still actively organising with the group to save the park two years later. Over time, the group also mixed more, with some of the students participating in other initiatives, like assemblies of the occupied social centre and some of them eventually moving in there.

According to one of the early organisers, in the beginning of 2023, the group was "getting tired" and decided to give new energy to the campaign by inviting other groups such as XR, FFF. One of the organisers explained:

We thought about what to do, and we were seeing that these others were fighting for the same things as we did. XR, PE, FFF, the other ecologists, we were very interested in working with them. [...] We thought about inviting them to [our group] but realised we want the same thing, but have different ways of getting there. Maybe some of us are fighting more with the institutional method, and some are more confrontational. We thought we can try to do this in the caserma (sic!) building behind the park, so we occupied it and started the laboratory. [...] We felt like it was something very practical, very tangible to do.





Instead of integrating individuals from other collectives into an existing group, the initial organisers decided to create a collaborative network in the form of a political laboratory, kicked-off in the form of occupying the old military barracks behind the park for multiple days, to create a physical and political space to brainstorm on the future of the struggle for the park. One outcome of this was the decision to invite activists with experience on forest occupations, action climbing and tree-house building, to share their skills and help in the initial stages of the construction of a tree-house, which was intended to become a physical space of resistance and hub of a potential permanent occupation of the park, after the barracks were evicted. Another result was a multi-day climate social camp in the summer of 2023, with discussions,

workshops and disruptive mass actions related to a broad set of social and ecological goals.

In the fall of 2023, the network also started a petition to force a meeting with the administration of the neighbourhood the park is in, in which the civil servants would have to answer the critical questions of the network, local residents and justify their planning choices. The idea was to also present legal and administrative problems identified by the network's lawyer. This process included several mobilising events, such as the symbolic planting of 100 roses as a thorny barricade around the park, collective clean-up sessions and collective picnics in the park.

After the required 300 signatures from individuals with registered addresses in the neighbourhood, a meeting with local civil servants took place in January 2024. One of the organisers explained to me: "The project was written in a bad way. They need to write a new plan. No construction can start in the park until the final plan is approved." He categorised the meeting as a success because it helped mobilise the neighborhood

"[it] was a success because we spent a lot of time before getting people involved. Lots of people came to the meeting and were angry.[...] After the meeting there was a public meeting in the park and a lot of new people came that we integrated."

He also pointed out that this was a good starting point after a calm winter in which not a lot of things happened in the park. Initially we thought the park would be demolished in late 2023, but when this did not happen, many people stopped being active. As of mid-February, many of the activists who were still engaging in the network focused their energy on other initiatives and projects, still engaging with a large proportion of the same people as the months before but only rarely about the park. In this situation we all became interested in how the network would change after the municipality meeting.



## Network Science

Have you ever joined a group and not understood how they worked? For example, when I first came to Lützerath and wanted to get hands on with translating some of the material into English or Dutch to promote the occupation in the Netherlands and help people go there, I did not know who to ask. When I asked a person who lived there for longer, they told me there is a media working group. This was good information, but I did not know anyone in the media working group. Even worse, I did not even know anyone who might know someone in the media working group. Understanding how a group works, is not only know HOW, it is also know WHO. Very interesting examples about this can also be found in the "Troubles in Danni" zine (3). This goes to show that for understanding the groups we work in, it is not only about understanding the formal structure (working groups, campaign sections etc.), but also who is in contact with each other. Thinking about groups we organise in it is sometimes clear that a few people have contact to everyone else, and a lot of people only have contact to people in their direct environment. This puts the people with lots of contacts in a powerful position. They have access to a lot of knowledge, information and can control which information reaches who.

To describe these patterns in a lot of different groups (networks) very precisely, we can use some formal terms to define elements and structure of the network. Let's start from ourselves:

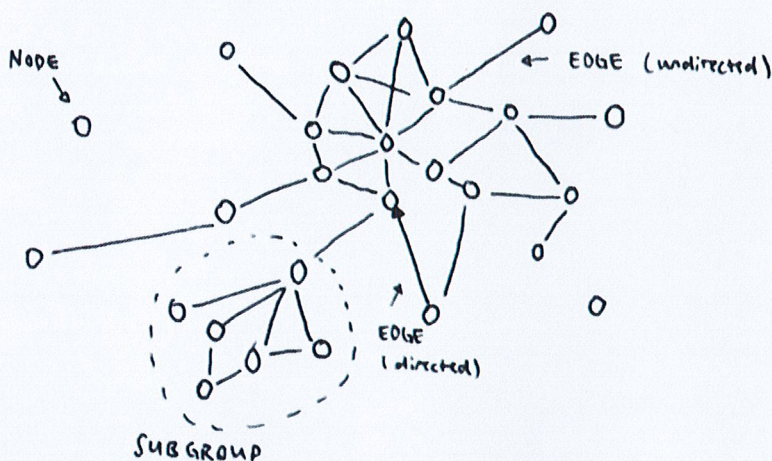
*Node ( $n$ ):* A node is a point in the network. In this case nodes are individuals in the collective. If we are interested different groups (for example XR, Fridays for Future, Disrupt) instead of individuals, the nodes could be the groups. In other cases (not social movements) nodes could be pages on the internet, actors in movies or even proteins in the human body. Nodes can have characteristics (like age, which group the person organises in most etc.). Often the word vertex is also used instead of node.

*Edge ( $m$ ):* An edge is a connection between two nodes. Often, edges are contact, so two nodes are connected by an edge if they have contact. They can also be a shared characteristic: two people are connected by an edge if they work in the same collective, or have the same ideas. They can also have a direction, for example when A sends B a message, but B does not reply, the contact only goes in one direction. Edges can also have weights: A and B talk 3 times a week, but B and C only once a month. The weight can be used to show that A and B have more frequent contact. Often the word link is also used instead of edge

*Network:* A network then is defined as  $n$  nodes, that are connected by  $m$  edges. If you do not know who actually has contact, you can also think about the probability of an edge between to nodes. Then you get a network of  $n$  nodes that are connected with probability  $p$



# NETWORK (S)



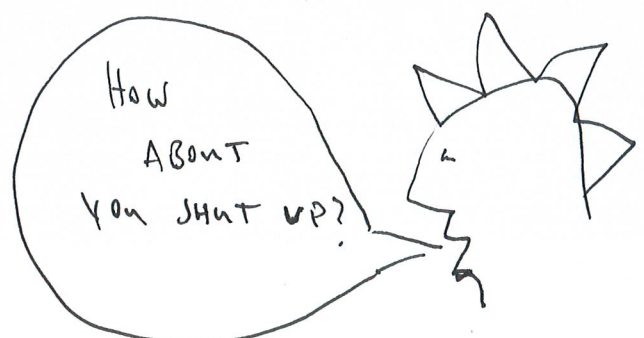
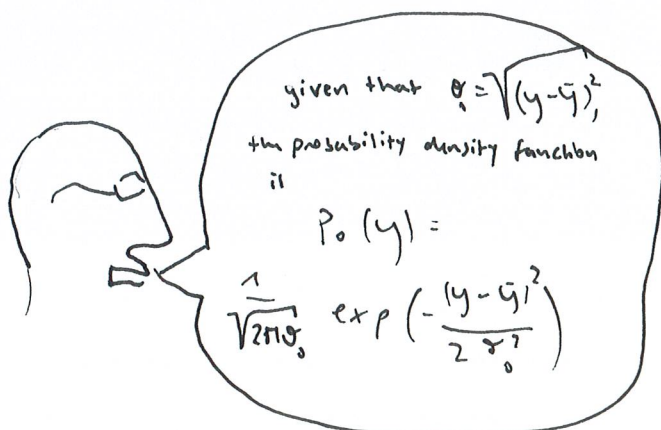
AND THEIR  
STRUCTURE



## Structure of Networks

Knowing these basic concepts of a network as something that is connected with nodes and edges can help us say a lot of things about a group of people, or a movement that functions in a networked way. How many people are there? How many contacts are there between them? Does the network grow or shrink? But to know more about the actual structure, internal dynamics and how the network develops and adapt, it is necessary to look at some more things:

*Degree Centrality (k):* The degree centrality (also often just degree) is one of the most fundamental statistic about networks. Degree is the number of connection of a node. The degree of a specific node ( $i$ ) can be written as  $k_i$ . If  $i$  has contact to 10 other people, so 10 edges are connected to node  $i$ , then  $k_i = 10$ . This is a clear way of showing who has how much contact in the network. It can be useful to look at the average degree (how many people does the average person have contact with), the maximum degree (how many contacts does the person with the most contact have), or the minimum degree (are there any people who maybe do not have any contact at all?)





*Degree Distribution  $P(k)$* : Often, the average number of connections does not tell us a lot. This is because the number of connections is not normally distributed. In social groups, it is often not the case that some people have very little connections, a lot of people have a medium amount of connections, and few people have a lot of connections. Often, there are a very few people that have a lot of connections, some people that have a medium amount of connections, and a lot of people who only have few connections. Think about a forest occupation, where there is a hard core of organisers who lives there for a longer time. They are always there, talk to most of the people who come by, do press and media work and are generally well known. They have a lot of connections, but usually this group is small. Then there are some people who are there kind of frequently (or even permanently) but do not participate in plenaries so much, do not do work that is visible to the public etc. These are often more people (but also not the majority) and they know their way around and know a fair amount of people. Then there is the large group of people who are new to the forest or come now and then for short periods of time. They do not know a lot of people outside their affinity group and do not have so much contact. In general this rule (few people have lots of contact, lots of people have little contact) is true in a lot of situations. Next to this, I drew both a 'normal' degree distribution and next to it the degree distribution of *actual* existing networks. The interesting thing is that we see this kind of distribution in a lot of other places as well. For example: Very few people have a lot of money, while a lot of people have very little money! These types of distributions are extremely unequal and it we should be critical of the fact that we see them all around us. One specific type of these distributions is even called the *power law* distribution. Something to think about for anarchists.

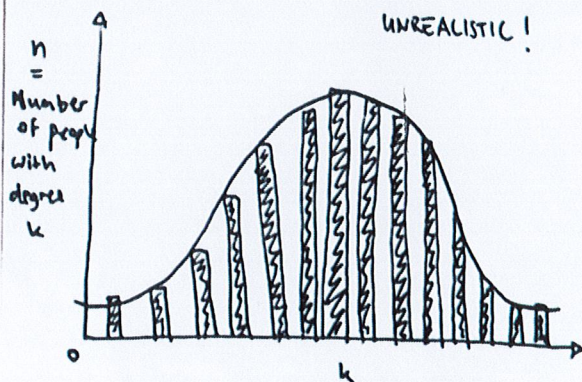
## DEGREE DISTRIBUTION ↗



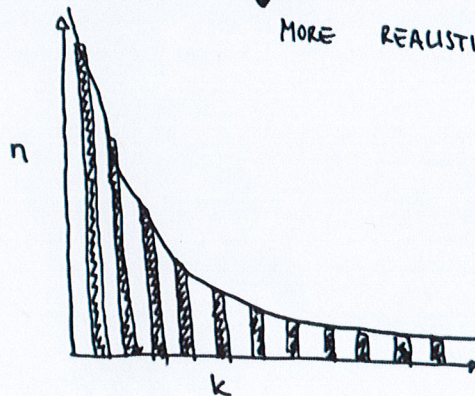
DEGREE ( $k$ ) = 6



UNREALISTIC!



MORE REALISTIC!



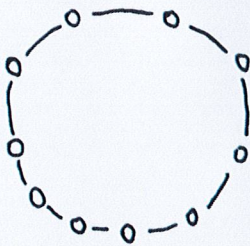


# HUBS (OR NOT) ...

NO HUB(S)

$n = 10$

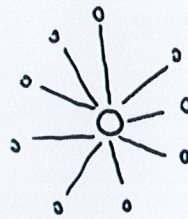
$k = 2$   
for everyone



1 HUB

$n = 10$

$k = 9$  (for the hub)  
vs.  
 $1$  (for the rest)



**Hubs:** Hubs are nodes in the network that have a high degree. They are connected to a lot of people and are the ones that often have a lot of informal power in the network. Even if there are no formal hierarchies, if you are connected to a lot of people, you get a lot of information. You probably hear things very early and there are very few things you do not hear at all. Hubs also have power over who gets which information and who can contact each other. If A is connected to B and B is connected to C, A can reach C through B. In the real world often this looks like this: I am new to a collective and I want to know who has keys to the building we want to have a meeting in. If there is one person who has been organising for a long time they probably know, so I ask them. They can decide to pass the contact of the person to the key on to me. This puts them in a position of power. If this person has a lot of connections and a lot of information, they have a lot of power in the network. It is easy to see how structures like this can create an informal hierarchy. But there are also a lot of positive things about hubs. First of all, they make distances really short. If I know someone who knows almost everybody, I can reach almost everybody with only one person in between. This is pretty quick. If I am connected to A and A is connected to Z, I do not have to go through B, C, D, E, F ... until I reach Z. Also, if I have a chain of 5 people to reach my contact and one of them randomly does not reply, I do not reach my contact. Just randomly, the chance that one in five people will not answer my message is higher than that one person randomly does not answer. Obviously reality is much more complex than that, but in very general terms, hubs make the network robust, because when a lot of nodes can randomly fail before communication is not possible anymore. As long as the hubs are in the network, communication will work. The connecting role of hubs is really good when it comes to random failing of nodes, but it becomes really dangerous when we consider repression. Repression is always targeted at points where it really hurts. History has showed us that police and the state go for those people who mobilise people, connect people and are central to campaigns and actions. If everybody can reach each other through the hubs, but only through the hubs, and the police takes them out it is somewhat game over. To make this all more clear, I drew two extreme networks: one where everybody is only connected to their direct neighbors, and one where everybody is only connected to one hub. You can play around by starting from one node and following the edges to pass a message to another node. You can count how many steps you need for the message to arrive. Then you can take out a node (and the edges connected) to it and pass a message again.

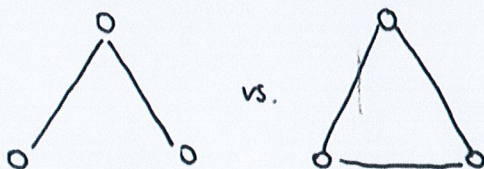


*Clustering (c)*: Another interesting structural factor on networks is clustering. Clustering basically asks how many of your friends are also friends. Consider yourself (A) and your two friends (B and C). You have a connection with both of them. If they are also friends, the three of you are a closed triangle.


Clustering becomes really interesting when looking at subgroups in the network. In social groups we often have high clustering in smaller subgroups, for example I am connected to everyone in my barrio, and they are probably also all connected to each other. On the other hand, networks usually have low clustering outside of the subgroups: I am connected to some people in Barrio A and some in Barrio B, but that does not necessarily mean these people are also connected to each other. Clustering is also interesting in terms of power and informal hierarchies in a network. Similar to hubs that connect two nodes, if A is connected to B and C, but B and C are not connected to each other, this gives A some power in the relationship with B and C. Clustering ranges between 0 and 1, where 0 means there are no closed triangles and 1 means all triangles of three nodes are closed.

*Density*: Density is the number of edges that are actually there out of all the possible edges. Networks with a low density are called sparse, and most social networks are sparse. Especially for bigger networks, like a forest occupation of 100+ people, it is simply unrealistic to be connected to and have regular contact with everyone. Density is really interesting because it can also make distances shorter and the network more robust. The more connections you have in the network, the more you can take out before you cannot reach each other anymore. Density is also interesting when we look at subgroups. The same way we expect the clustering to be higher within a barrio or affinity group than in the whole forest, the density will also be higher. Density ranges between 0 (no edges) and 1 (all possible edges are there).


## CLUSTERING



## DENSE vs. SPARSE



$$\begin{aligned} \text{density} &= m / \frac{n(n-1)}{2} \\ &= 17 / \frac{10(10-1)}{2} \\ &= 17/45 \\ &= 0.37\bar{7} \end{aligned}$$



$$\begin{aligned} \text{density} &= 10/45 \\ &= 0.22 \end{aligned}$$

→ not really sparse, but less dense.

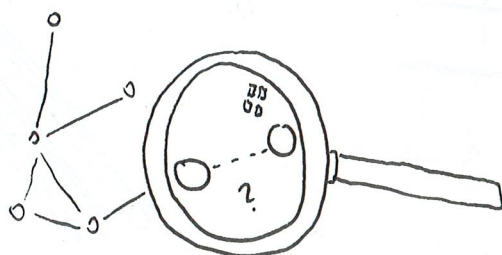


To sum up, there are a couple of claims that network science makes about social networks (like activist collectives) that I think are pretty realistic and worth keeping in mind when we think about how we work together:

1. Networks have hubs. This leads to short distances and the network staying together, even if some people drop out
2. Networks have a degree distribution where few people have a lot of connections (hubs) and a lot of people have few connections. This leads to a situation in which the hubs are central to the network and have a lot of (informal) power.
3. Networks have subgroups. These are smaller clusters or communities of people who are connected well to each other (high clustering and density) but the groups are not so well connected amongst each other.

If you want to learn more about the network science, there are a lot of good materials and books openly accessible online (4)

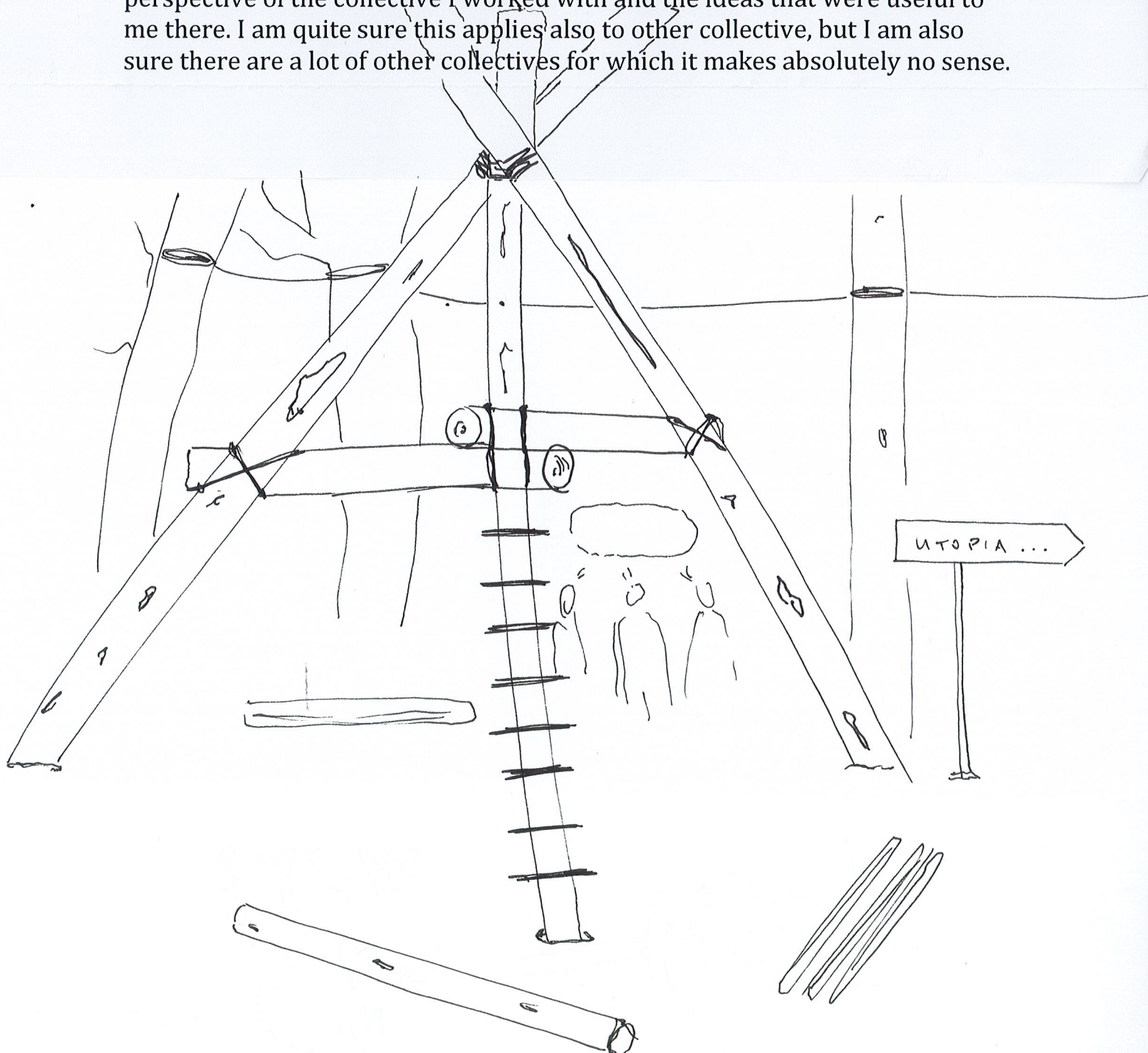
**The problem with network science:** A lot of people who are doing network science come from a background of mathematics or physics. They like using quantifying things. How many connections, how high is the density, how long are the distances? This can tell us a lot about the structure of the network and you can apply it to a lot of different things, but it does not tell us anything about why we see the things we see. Looking at the network it is not clear why person A is a hub and person B is not, or why some people are a small independent cluster. Thinking about a real collective you could probably say things like: "Oh this person became so central because they are active for a long time, and they are the only person with access to the bank account at the moment". These explanations are nothing classic network science is usually concerned with. It only explains one side of activist collectives or movements as networks (the network part). If we want to understand more, we have to also look at the network itself.





## New Social Movements

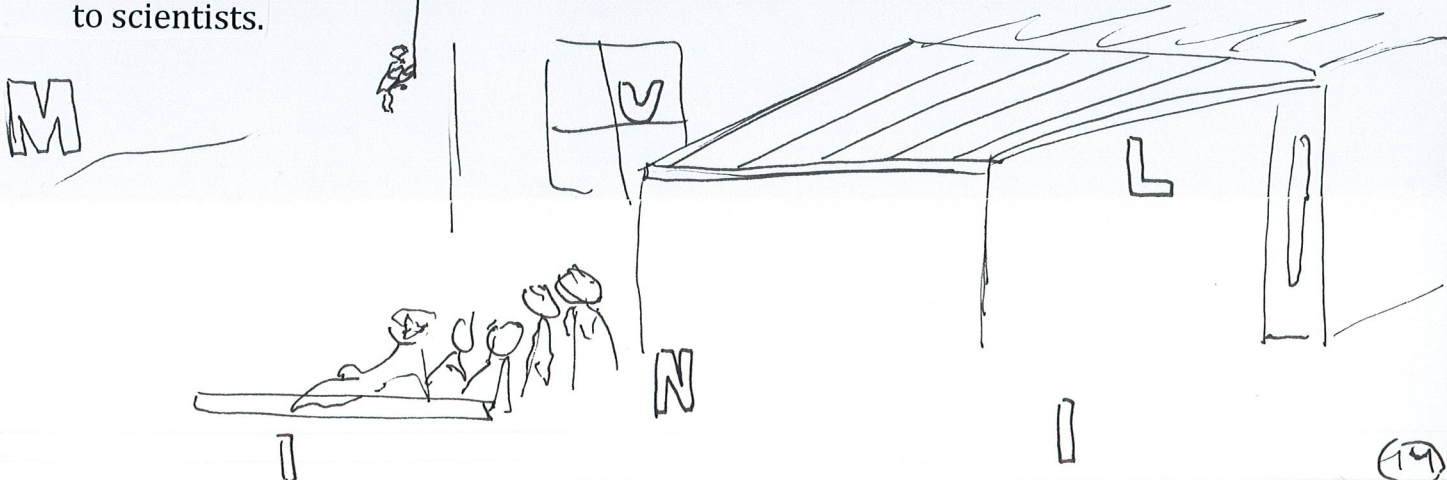
Our movements are networks. Or at least it is useful to understand them as networks. We try to get rid of a lot of formal structure and hierarchies, but informal structure remains. The previous section about network science hopefully showed what was clear to many anyways: even in anarchist organising, some people will have more power than others depending on their position in the group. There are also smaller subgroups in networks that have more connections within the group than between them. Network science does not really say anything (especially for activist networks) of why these things exist. And why would it? After all it is the science of networks in general. What I want to do in this (shorter) section is to outline some ideas behind new social movements and how they are built. Again, I am speaking from the perspective of the collective I worked with and the ideas that were useful to me there. I am quite sure this applies also to other collective, but I am also sure there are a lot of other collectives for which it makes absolutely no sense.





my frustrations with scientific literature on social movements...

As an activist I became very frustrated with scientific literature on activism for a while and would like to get that out of the way before I show the things I actually considered useful. First off, the literature on social movements I had access to was (like a lot of science) very "western" and centered around the experience of young people in Europe and the US. Anarchism was sometimes presented as something that had been invented by some philosophers in the 19th century, completely ignoring the anarchist practices and forms of organising that were practiced for hundreds of years. Just because we (as in "western" people) have been living in either feudalism or nation states for some time does not mean this has always been the reality of everyone. Secondly, most of the articles I read were written by people who never gave back to the people they did research with/ about. This is something that is very strongly perceived by Sami people (5), whose resistance has become a "cool thing" to study for scientists that do not understand that these people are struggling for their lives after having been colonially ruled for multiple centuries. In science some interesting publications can get you quite far: high salaries, grants for research projects, permanent contracts. Using disadvantaged people that fight important struggles to your advantage without seriously giving back is just disgusting. In my case, I was directly active in this collective for more than half a year and devoted much of my time to contributing to the campaign by organising funding, events, and connecting struggles. I gained a lot of insights while working with them and the only thing I actually asked anyone to do for my research was to fill in a survey once a month which took 5 minutes. Still I felt like a parasite, because there were so many other people doing the same work without ever "getting anything out of it". One of the reasons I am writing this zine is also to try and give back in ways that other people maybe cannot because they have not systematically collected insights over a long period of time and documented them well, or they did not have the same educational privileges as I do. The third thing that really upset me, is that a lot of the literature is not accessible to a broader public. With network science that is already not nice, but in the end that is quite mathematical literature that is not easy to apply to an everyday movement context without really getting into it. Social movement literature on the other hand should have some solid take-aways for people actually doing organising work, especially if these people spend heaps of time talking to scientists.





A lot of scientific literature is published in scientific journals that are mostly hidden behind paywalls and controlled by capitalist publishing giants like Elsevier. These companies are not only responsible for the fact that normal people have to pay to read scientific articles, but also for that fact that sometimes scientists even need to pay to get an article published that other people need to pay to read. They are responsible for productivity pressure and precarious work arrangement in a lot of science and should be boycotted wherever possible. If you manage to get access to a scientific article after all, they are often written in such a language that people who did not go to university barely understand anything. Much of the (in my opinion) good texts or books about or for social movements definitely take ideas from science, but make them more understandable (6,7). My idea with this zine is also to give back by making some knowledge that has helped me and I considered useful available for free and in a way that it is (hopefully) also understandable for people that did not have the privilege to focus on reading texts that they had access to through an institutional subscription for multiple years. If things are still unclear, I am happy to hear feedback or talk in person if you see me around.

#### the actually useful ideas about social movements in the literature

The new social movement literature also gets a lot right in my opinion. A very important take away that I have talked to a lot of people in social movements about is the fact that movements are very diverse. In my case not in the sense of cultural background or whiteness, but more in terms of political ideas, socialisation and class. A lot of movements were traditionally based on class. The proletariat against the bourgeoisie, or the capitalists. As anti-capitalists this is a story we still like to tell for our movements nowadays. We fight an anti-capitalist fight, but how credible is it really that we fighting for the liberation of the working class if much of the organising is done by people with university degrees that either work in highly skilled work or decide to not work because they have access to other means of getting money? Groups like Fridays for Future or Extinction Rebellion are no unions that rally against the CEOs politicians and ruling "class". Often they request a fundamental change in direction from those in power, but rarely want to dismantle the system entirely. With the collective to save the park it was somewhat similar. It was not a class struggle in which people were united in a fight against those who have money and power. Surely, some anarchists and more radical people that were doing a lot of the organising work understood the struggle for the park as an anti-capitalist struggle, but this is not what got people in the neighbourhood on board that were just walking their dog in the park. In the same way many locals might be dissatisfied with the authorities, but it is not the anarchist thought of rebelling against a ruling class that gets them to support forest occupations.



Instead, and here I really agree with the literature, it is **collective identity** that makes movements stick together. We are not all proletarians fighting against the bourgeoisie, but there is something we all identify with. There are convincing arguments, that even movements like occupy wallstreet were more about a collective identity than class consciousness (8). Collective identity is needed to unite the diverse, diffuse group of people who have come to care about a similar thing. On the other hand, this means that the collective identity that needs to be actively created and maintained. We need to continue convincing ourselves that we want to fight together. If we do not do this anymore, we probably will not continue working with each other because we have nothing that unites us. An extreme, but funny example comes from the song "Baby I'm an anarchist" by Against Me!



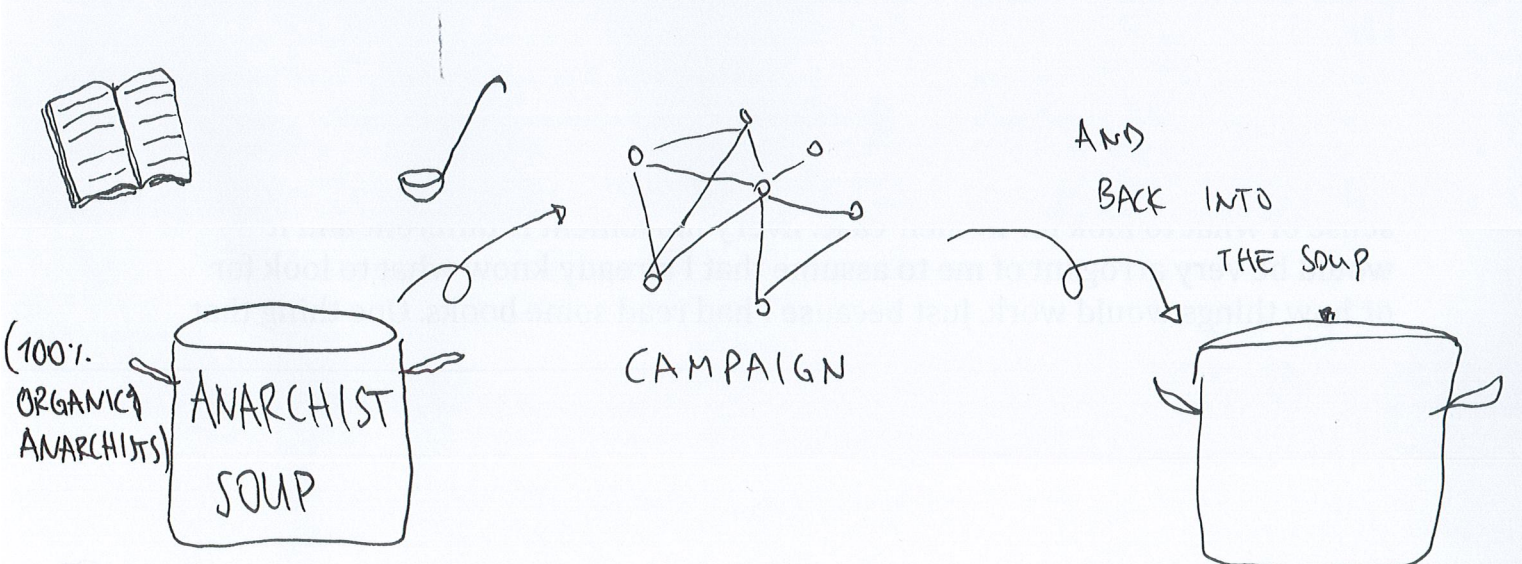
"Cause baby, I'm an anarchist and you're a spineless liberal  
We marched together for the eight-hour day and held hands in the streets of Seattle  
But when it came time to throw bricks through that Starbucks window  
You left me all alone, all alone."



Here the singer and a spineless liberal had a reason to march together, united in a common struggle. They shared a goal (the eight-hour day) and with this some collective identity of advocating work workers'/ employees' rights. When the limits (or the illusion) of this collective identity became clear, they went separate ways.

Events like this: movements coming together and growing under one identity, to fall apart again later, led one person to write something about social movements that really resonated with me:

"New social movements function less as standing armies than as cultural laboratories that vacillate between latency and visibility, as they episodically organise for specific battles and then revert to politicised subcultures that sustain movement visions and values for the next round of explicitly organised activism" (9)





This is a good example of what I mentioned earlier about how a lot of the scientific texts on social movements are just not written in an accessible way. What the person writing this is basically saying in my opinion is: - (new) social movements come and go. With new social movements he means actual groups and collectives like XR or FFF. He does not use movement in the way that we often say "there is a climate justice movement since forever". - These groups form if there is a need for them. A good example is the park, where the collective formed when the plans are announced. - Once there is no need to organise for a specific problem anymore, the group or collective disappears again. - The people that were in these groups or collectives are not gone, but go back to their subcultures and continue being very political people that organise other things and keep their ideas and visions alive.

I think this is a very good observation. This statement completely ignores the issue of burnout and people becoming traumatised, and because of that not organising anymore, but the observation that people organise specific things and then reflect, learn and regroup for new projects is realistic. This statement in my opinion does not only describe reality quite well, but also some of the ideals I (and some other people) would like to see in organising: a flexible movement, that can quickly build collectives for specific fights, but also has the structures and support to keep people engaged over longer periods of time and helps us all learn, reflect and develop.

Reading this statement I also had some questions: - How does this process of forming a specific collective work? - How do people go back into these subcultures if the specific collective does not exist anymore - What are these subcultures anyways?

In the collective to save the park, I was in the situation that others around me perceived the campaign to be stalling after the municipality meeting. The plans were somewhat on hold, and the struggle was not urgent anymore. Sure, the campaign was not completely over, but with less pressure to save the park short term, and other things (e.g. Palestine encampments) coming up, there were surely less reasons to put energy into the collective to save the park. I decided to take a look what happens to the collective: Do people go back into subcultures? How does this happen? What are these subcultures anyways?

During this time, I talked a lot to people in the movement, trying to make sense of what to look for in their case. Every movement is different and it would be very arrogant of me to assume that I already know what to look for or how things would work, just because I had read some books. One thing that

was very clear, was that an important sub-group or structure in this collective were affinity groups.



## Affinity Groups

Asking ten different people, I probably got 20 different answers when talking to people in the collective and broader movement. In the beginning, I thought I had a clear idea what an affinity group is, now I do not anymore. I used to think of an affinity group as a stable structure, a bit like a chosen family (not that your AG cannot include family members too), where you get support, support others and do political organising/action together. I also thought about affinity groups a bit in terms of action affinity groups. People that care for each other during (mass) actions and determine their action level together, but do not necessarily have a deeper bond outside of action. Both of these definitions are valid and the action-specific one is really popular with groups like Ende Gelände (10). People in the collective also had very different ideas about affinity groups: for some it was really action related, and for others much more based on a deep relationship of care, mutual support and long-term planning together. For some affinity group meant some degree of sharing of resources and money, for some the aspect of being politically active together was really important. This led to some confusing situations: once for example, I asked where some gear was I wanted to use and a person replied that it was with the affinity group of people who were younger and came from an XR or FFF background. When I asked these people, they had the gear and were the right people, but they were not sure if they were an affinity group they told me. Even though there were different understandings, affinity groups were clearly important. In one meeting, we were discussing about the distribution of climbing gear and one person said: "Let's not forget that our basic structure are affinity groups. I think that we should just have one action kit per affinity group so we can go and do actions."

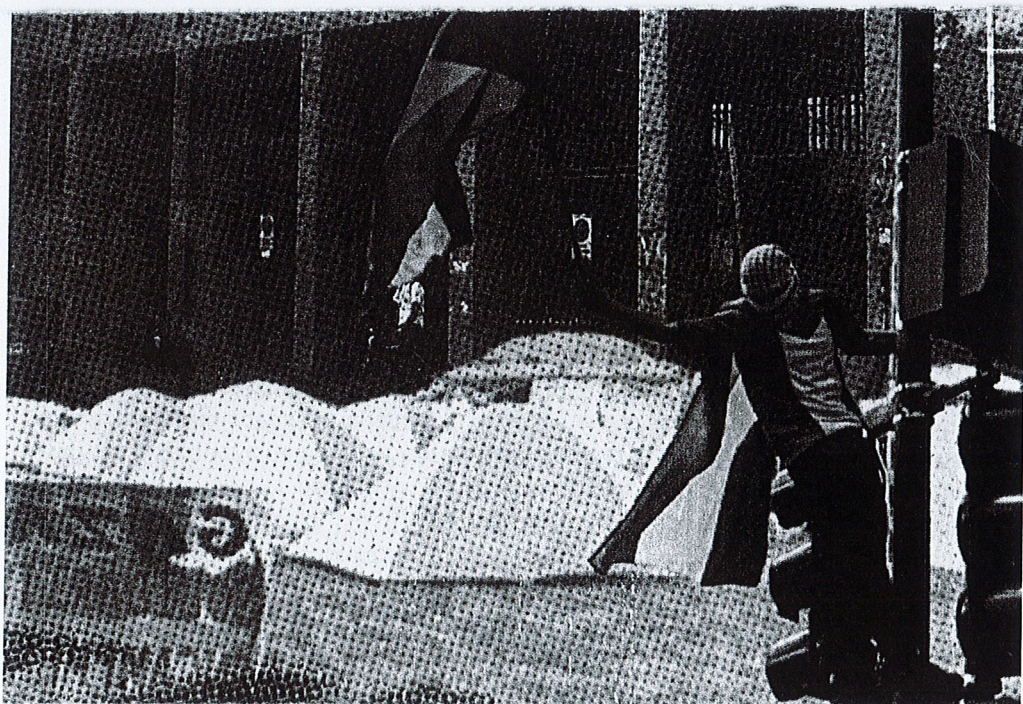
In the end, I followed the whole network throughout the whole six months, but especially the two affinity groups I was most in contact with. I did not feel comfortable saying something about other affinity groups because I did not know them well enough. The two groups I did know well were both involved in climbing activism but came from different backgrounds. Both of them developed from political work outside the collective to save the park. One of them had a background in the student ecology group at the local university and the other one had a stronger background in FFF and XR. The student ecology group was older and a relatively stable group of people who were



friends, some of them in romantic relationships too. Some of them also lived together. The younger group was the one that did not necessarily even consider themselves an affinity group in the beginning but grew a lot as a group during the six months I spent with them. Both of the groups had some features of affinity groups I have seen more often and also people doing research on historical and current movements have found.

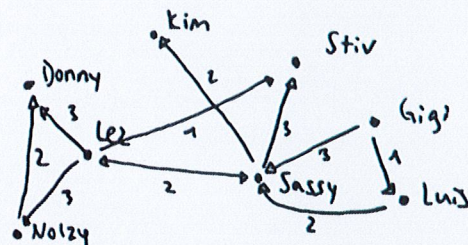
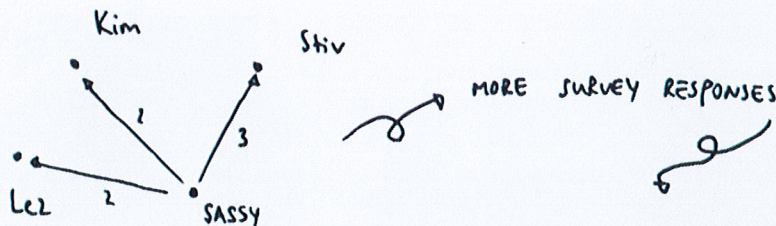
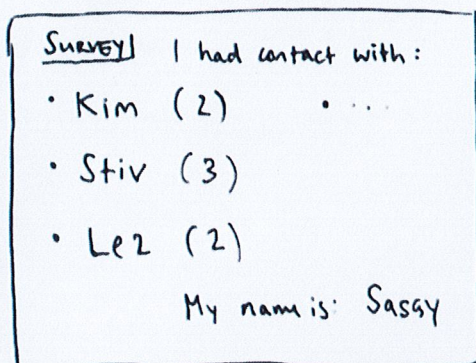
1. They are groups of roughly 5-15 individuals
2. They try to maintain and develop relationships of care, mutual aid and support, especially in challenging situations
3. They are politically active (together)
4. They try to create alternatives to the state and corporations
5. They want to experiment with new forms of living together and relating to each other in the process (11)

In the beginning of the broader collective for the park that brought together a lot of groups, it was the older affinity group that had initiated building a tree house and inviting people from abroad to share skills. Over time, the younger affinity group got more into climbing and the older one focused more on other things within the campaign. This led to a situation, in which there was actually not so much overlap in the work they were doing as I thought when I first started living there. When the campaign stalled and people were doing other things, I thought that these affinity groups would have less contact with each other and do their own things. In other words, that the collective would revert into subgroups (in this case affinity groups) if the need for explicit organising is not so strong anymore.

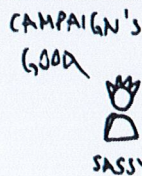
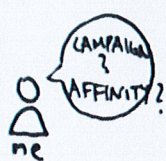




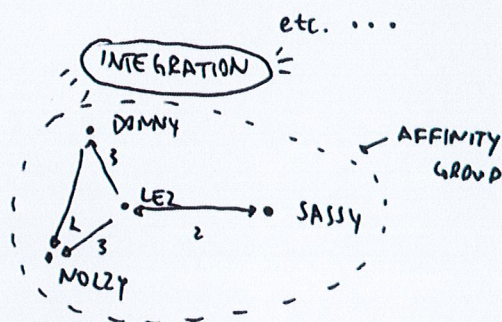
# THE PROCESS



TALKING TO PEOPLE



AFFINITY?  
I'M WITH... ER...  
DONNY, LE2  
AND NOLZY!



THIS SHOULD MAKE SENSE AFTER READING THE NEXT PAGES :

## My Methods and Analysis

Now I just needed to find out if what I was thinking was actually the case, or just an idea put in my head by this person called Buechler that writes intellectual paragraphs about social movements. I had already started to do research long before the municipality meeting. In an informal way, a lot of us do social research all the time: we observe what is going on around us, and we use information that we have already or need to look for to make sense of it. Having never organised in Italy before, the ways in which people organised very not very familiar to me. There was also a language barrier, but everything was very interesting. Especially, because it seemed very chaotic from the outside, but a lot of things happened, and they were done very well. Surely it was not the style of organising I was used to or comfortable with, but I always



thought it was very good in its own way. In the beginning I only observed and talked to people about how their work is going. I also tried to find out in personal talks what is important to people and what they would like to know. Having a bit of an outsider's perspective really helped me here, because I never had the feeling I knew enough and always wanted to know more. At the same time, I also had a different perspective and an idea of some things that are maybe completely outside of the reality of the organisers that are in their own local context. One thing that really stuck with me was the following: In one of the conversations we had as a group, someone said: "Collectives around here have two years. Usually they come up and after about two years they disappear again. If you make it longer than that, you have already done a pretty solid job". When asked about what the people do once the collective is gone, the person answered: "They do something else. Another project or something like this." This was pretty interesting, and I decided to look into this more. To do this, I decided to collect some data about the contact network of people with a survey and to tell a story to accompany this, from talking to people on the campaign. Talking to people, I also tried to find out about friendships and affinity groups.

#### the survey

For the survey, I made an online questionnaire people could fill in once a month. In this survey, people could give their activist name, age and gender, but also some things like which political group they are most active in. With this I tried to see if people form smaller groups based on the political groups they are usually active in, or whether some demographic factors like age and gender have an influence on how long you are active for the park. For feedback for the network itself, I also used this survey a bit as an internal feedback form and included questions like "How satisfied are you with the campaign?", "What do your friends, family, neighbours etc. think about the campaign" or "How satisfied are you with the decision making processes in the collective". The most important part of the survey was the one used to build the network though: Here I asked people to think about who they were in contact with over the last month for the park. They were asked to list at least three names and keep a small diary of their campaign interactions for the next round. Finally, everyone was asked to rate their contacts: 1 being contact more than once a month, 2 being contact more than once a week, 3 being contact every day. From this I could make a network where every person who filled the survey or was named was a node and people who named someone or were named had an edge between them. This was pretty nice, because I did not need everyone to fill in the survey every time to get a decent overview of the contact network.



BLA

BLA

BLA

## talking to people

Next to collecting the data on who had contact with each other, I also talked to a lot of people. This was pretty stressful. I tried my best, but my Italian is pretty dogshit and I got pretty tired sitting through 2 hours of meetings in which I only understood half of what was being said, or having conversations in which we did not always understand each other well. I made it clear to people from the beginning, that I was doing research and tried to always explicitly ask if I could use something they said. I also always made clear that nobody needed to talk to me and I am also very happy to talk and hang out even if they do not want to participate in my research. In the end, I was there to learn, to help out on the campaign and to help build an action climbing and forest occupation movement with my experience from other places. Doing research was a happy coincidence and a nice way of actually getting some funding for doing organising work more or less full time. Still when talking to people I felt awkward a lot, because I either had the feeling that I was just using them for my benefit, or that I was not actually doing any research and just working on the campaign while pretending to be a researcher. It was difficult to find a good balance. In the end, I was interested in everything people had to say, but mostly their thoughts on the campaign, the affinity groups, their friendships and how their collective was changing. I decided to really focus on the group of people around me, that I knew fairly well, since about 9 months before I moved to Italy and that doing a lot of organising work in the collective. I tried to follow their affinity groups more up close, because I felt most comfortable and thought I would get the most unfiltered insights. At the same time, I had the feeling that these people were also comfortable enough around me to tell me if they did not feel comfortable in the research situation anymore. I used the ideas of people in which the direction went to compare with the survey, to see if two ways of looking at something give roughly the same results. This is called triangulation and used to get closer to what might actually be "true". The basic idea is: if two very different ways of looking at the situation show the same things, you are probably on the right path. Finally, I integrated the information of what people told me about their affinity and friendship into the network, to see how affinity influences the changes in the network. The drawing ~~below~~ shows the process of collecting the survey data, talking to people, combining and comparing the data.

/  
IN THE BEGINNING



## analysing the network

For the analysis of the network, I mostly used functions from the statnet package for the programming language R, and some I wrote myself. If you are interested, you can find a lot of this online (12). If you cannot find anything or have questions, I am happy to share my knowledge and code. In general, I can really recommend to take a dive into programming languages, especially the universe of open source and free software. A lot of people hold pretty anarchist ideals here, for example that software should be free to modify for anyone, understandable and replicable. There are a lot of idealists out there and the likelihood that your computer only really functions because of some person in Nebraska doing passionate volunteering work on some code library is very high actually (13). What I did for analysing the network was to look at how some things like size, clustering, density and the distances develop over time, but also looked into the role of affinity groups very specifically. Here I checked whether the affinity groups have less contact with each other as the campaign begins to stall (simply by calculating the number of edges within one affinity group and the ones between the affinity groups). I also calculated how being an affinity group influences how long you are staying in the network. For this I did a logistic regression, where I predicted the likelihood of an individual staying in the network for those who are a member of an affinity group and for those who are not. I am not going to go into the maths behind logistic regression, but if you are interested I managed to understand it and I really struggled with maths in highschool, so I think most people can also understand it (14). It is also pretty cool to understand, because it is in a lot of machine learning models and these are all around us if we want or not anyways.

## analysing what people told me

People told me a lot of stories, anecdotes and their opinions. Once I asked someone how they think the day at the park went, and expected a "good" or "not so good", with maybe some explanation on why. What I got instead was a 36 minute (I looked at my watch before asking them to know when I need to be home) on the event, how it ties into the campaign struggle, the local politics, climate change, mafia and the catholic church. While I would get annoyed with people who do not stop talking in other situations (this is also a big reason why I get annoyed with myself, sometimes I only realise after I should have shut up long ago), in this situation it was great. The next day though, someone gave a completely different interpretation of the situation.



The difficult part of my analysis here was to represent the complexity and diversity in what people were saying, but also find some common story in the developments and the campaign. I was convinced that it was not just all chaos and disagreement, but sometimes it was a bit hard to find when ten different people tell you ten different things. Here my role as a scientist was very different from what I was told that scientists do, well into my university studies: Instead of being the distant observer, I was engaged in what people were doing, I was emotional, I was participating, and I was trying to find my way of telling the story of this collective. Many scientists, especially from feminist and critical positions are actually for such a way of doing science (15), and I agree with them. It is just not possible to be objective and I think there is nothing wrong with being subjective, as long as you are open and reflective about who you are and how it might affect your research. For me it helped to get away from this extractionist idea of taking data and fucking off, and more into an interaction at eye level, where I was there to learn, to contribute and to give back. Personally, I think there is a place for science like this in social movements, and a lot of the people who I talked to agreed. I also think it is difficult though and will never be perfect. For me this is an ongoing process of reflection and I am happy to talk to anyone who is open to this discussion.

ENOUGH THEORY!

WHAT DID ACTUALLY HAPPEN?



## What I found

### the network itself

What was most interesting and important for me to begin with, was to see if there was actually one network or multiple. What this means is if everybody (or at least almost everybody) is connected to each other through some other people, or if there are separate parts of the collective that cannot reach each other at all. Across the six months I worked with the network, there were never more than four people disconnected from the main part of the network (called the giant component). Those few disconnected were mainly also people who were not really active that month and either did not have contact with anyone, or just with one other person that also did not have contact with anyone else. Additionally, the distances are pretty low. It never takes more than 6 steps to reach anyone else in the network. Keep in mind that this is not how easily people *can* reach each other, but how contact actually happened for the park in that month. We can explain this easily with the hubs: not everybody in the network needs to have a lot of connections to be able to reach everyone else quickly. It is enough that everyone is connected to one of the hubs that are connected to a lot of other people. This network is not so extreme though. In extreme cases one hub is connected to everyone else in the network and everyone else is only connected to the hub (see earlier). In the network at hand, nobody is even close to being connected to everyone else. The maximum degree never becomes bigger than half of the people in the network. There are also more hubs, because often more than 10 people have more than 10 connections. To a certain degree, this means that this network has an informal hierarchy: a lot of communication goes through the hubs, but this hierarchy is not so steep. Since there are quite some hubs, and no hub with anywhere close to the maximum number of possible connections, the importance of single individuals in the communication process is not extremely high. What is also interesting, is that the clustering is a lot higher than in random networks. So it is no coincidence that your connections are also connected to each other. This is a sign of friend groups and communities in the network. Below you can see an overview of the statistics I just discussed for all the four points of data collection. Below that there is also a visualisation of the network in March. Feel free to trace the contact and see how fast you can go from one node to any other node. Note how often you pass through the hubs.



## the development of the network

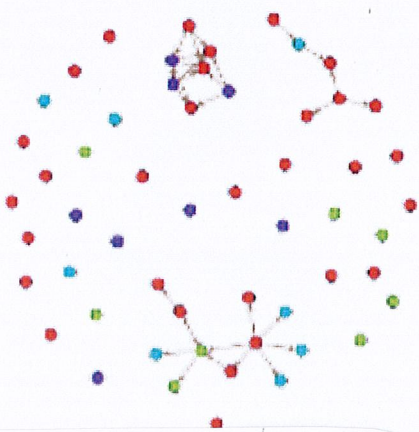
First, the network grows from 55 to 57 people between November and January. Then, after the meeting in January, there is a clear drop in the number of people in the network, from 57 to 44. This is almost a fourth of the total number of people in the network. This decrease is right after the municipality meeting that a lot of people found not really good. Here, the quantitative data looks quite different from what organisers (including me) were feeling, seeing, and saying. After the municipality meeting, there were some meetings in the park, with a lot of new people. Still less people filled in the survey than the month before. One possible explanation is that people just were less involved in the campaign. I asked what people thought of the campaign in the last round of the survey and more than half of the people perceived the campaign to be stalling after the municipality meeting. So even though there were some new people, and not a lot of people left completely, maybe not so many people were involved enough to care about filling in a survey. People also felt differently about the meeting itself. One person said that that "even though our efforts were not enough to stop the project, it was a success." Another person said "obviously I am frustrated, because we could only delay this project. But I am even more frustrated and angry because the people making the decisions [in the local administration] are all fucking idiots." When asked about what that meant for the future ambitions they said "che, now is even more important to fight, no?" The structure of the network also changed over time and that is quite interesting when it comes to informal hierarchies. In the beginning, there was nobody who was connected to more than one third of the network and a quarter of the people were connected to more than ten others. After the municipality meeting though, the maximum number of connections a single person had actually became higher, and the number of people with more than ten connections became lower. This means there are fewer hubs, and these have more connections. This makes them more important in the network. It is questionable, if this is actually a problem in terms of hierarchy. Sure we always want to break down hierarchies, even the informal ones, but this development is an immediate response to some people dropping out of the network: Some of the people who had a lot of connections before dropped out and their connections now need to talk to someone else. It is no surprise that they chose one of the hubs that are still in the network. It is likely a bigger problem instead of stress and burnout, if the remaining hubs need to take over the contact and work of other people who were doing a lot of the organising before.



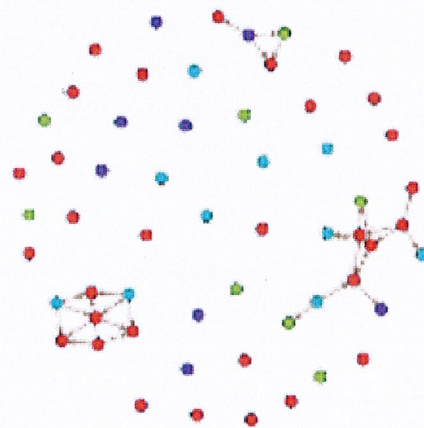
## affinity groups

I followed the two affinity groups I was most in contact with over time. It was super cool to see some of the people in the younger affinity group really come together as a group, develop a shared passion and organise together. I would like to emphasise that for the purpose of research I needed to draw clear boundaries of who is in the affinity group and who is not. In practice that is not so easy. Especially in the younger group, people did not necessarily think of themselves as an affinity group sometimes but acted like one. Who was part of that and who was not was not always clear. Also some people lived in an occupied social center and formed a small (third) affinity group that I was familiar with because I lived in the same place. When someone from the older affinity group moved into the social center for some time to help out the two groups kind of mixed and merged for some time. The figure below shows all the nodes (people) in the network and only the edges between people in the same affinity group. The older affinity group is the densely connected one and the younger one is the more strung out one (in the first three waves: bottom center, right, top right of the respective graphs) and then quite well connected in the fourth wave (bottom right). The small affinity group in the first two waves (top right and top) is the one from the social center, which is connected to the older one in wave three (left).

Affinity Network November 2023

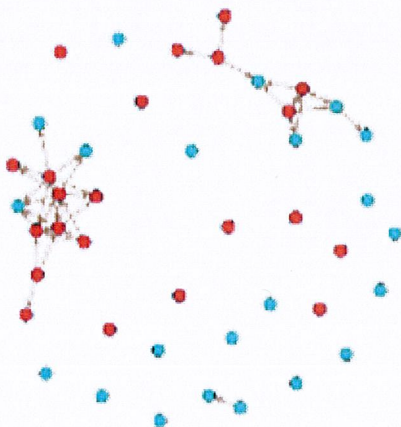


Affinity Network January 2024

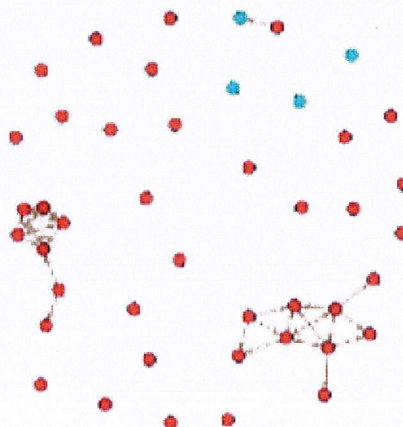


affinity  
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Affinity Network February 2024



Affinity Network March 2024





What is interesting in these graphs of the affinity networks as well, is the colour. The colors are what a mathematical algorithm thought were affinity groups. The algorithm is based on the frequency and intensity of contact: the more you have contact the more likely you are part of an affinity group. I also adapted the algorithm to put people in an affinity group if they have contact over longer periods of time, because I thought that affinity groups are probably very stable. If you look at the picture what the algorithm sorted in the same colour and what the affinity groups are, you see pretty quickly that there is almost no overlap. I found the answer talking to people. My algorithm was not actually that bad, it was just that the data on who had contact was not the right one for finding affinity groups. Obviously, a lot of the important contact within affinity groups happens outside of the campaign too. All the emotional care around the kitchen table, holidays together, actions and other projects, you name it. On top of that, I only asked for how often people had contact, not what it meant to them. I thought this was enough, since I organise the most with people that are also close to me. But this was not the case in this network. A lot of people from the affinity groups are hubs, they do a lot of organising work, but they are not always connected to a lot of other people from their affinity group very frequently. They are connected to people they organise with and "pull the cart" in different parts of the network.

What was also interesting about affinity groups was to see if they have less contact when the campaign is stalling. If so, this would be in favour of Buechler's argument, that movements break apart into subgroups when there is no explicit need for organising anymore. Throughout the four waves, the number of edges between the two affinity groups decreased steadily: from 24 to 17, 15 and finally 12. This looks like what Buechler was describing at first, but there are two issues. Firstly, this does not only happen after the municipality meeting, which in the eyes of many led to the stalling of the campaign, but stalling of the campaign also does not mean that there is no need for explicit organising anymore. Some people even said it is more important to fight, but others also thought the problem was not so urgent and relevant anymore after the meeting. The contact between affinity groups also decreased before the meeting, when everybody was still very alert about the problem. This brings us to the second problem: putting the decrease into perspective. The absolute decrease in edges between affinity groups is only one side of the coin: the number of people in the affinity groups (that filled in



the survey) also decreases. So while there is an absolute decrease in edges, there is no relative decrease in edges. The density between affinity groups does not really decrease (0.087, 0.079, 0.071, 0.078). Again, we need to put this into perspective with the qualitative findings from talking to people. I only asked people about contact for the campaign, and if you asked them about their contact with other affinity groups over lunch people would mostly agree that they had less contact with the other affinity groups. This was not only contact for the park, but all types of contact. Also here, the contact did not become less only after the municipality meeting, but throughout the whole period. One potential reason for this is the different development in the collective: while the younger people were very enthusiastic about action climbing and met regularly to do it, plan actions etc. the older affinity group was mostly busy organising other things. One day, we met in the park to go up to the treehouse and one of the people from the older group told me she had not climbed in nine months, while I had just been climbing the day before with people from the younger affinity group.

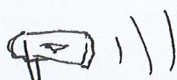
The affinity groups play an extremely important role in another part of organising though. I already explained the central role of many affinity group members in the network, but they are not only the most structured and committed organisers a lot of the time, they also keep people in the network. I was interested in whether some people stay in the network longer than others. I thought, maybe some groups are more committed, or it is related to age (for example younger people are more inexperienced and burn out quicker), or gender (for example non-cis men have a higher tolerance for frustration, care more and have better stamina, something the literature tells us). In the end I did not find any relevant insights with these categories. There were only two relevant predictors: how many friends you have in the network and if you are part of an affinity group. Here, being part of an affinity group was more important (statistically) than how many friends one has. For example two friends makes it roughly 3 times more likely to stay in the network for the whole period of time. On the other hand just being in an affinity group makes it more than 6 times as likely to be in the network for the whole period of time. What makes affinity groups even more important: people who were in affinity groups also had more friends in the network. This is because people in affinity groups already consider most of the people in their affinity group also their friends and they are also central organisers, which means they have more connections. This also makes it easier to make more friends.



So what makes affinity groups so important? First of all, people who decide to form a long-term affinity group focused on political work are clearly dedicated and also somewhat radical. They decide for a form of organising their social life and often also living together and sharing money that is often radically different from the heteronormative nuclear family model with capitalist work. A lot of these people do political organising as their main occupation. Additionally, a lot of them bring experience. Even the people in the younger affinity group were in no way inexperienced. Some of them had organised climate camps before, some actions and even week-long climbing trainings with a need for international coordination of material. Obviously, it is a great plus to have dedicated experienced people in your collective, but affinity groups are much more than that. I like the people around me I have affinity with, because they are also there for me (and I am there for them) when political organising is over. We go to the mountains together, cook, take care of each other when we are not doing well, and when I really messed up and made mistakes in my relationships they did not kick me out, but really wanted to help me become a better person and supported me in working through my mistakes. Talking to other people they feel the same thing. In this collective specifically, people told me that their affinity group members are just the people they like organising with and it all goes more or less smoothly because they know each other well. They keep each other from burnout and are there for each other when times are tough. When we look beyond affinity groups in (anarchist) organising, there are a lot of concepts that work very similar and proven successful. Even though I obviously completely disagree with the goals and methods of jihadist islamic terrorism, their terrorist cells are basically affinity groups. Scott Atran, who did research on who actually becomes a fighter for the Islamic State said: "although millions of people support violent jihad, very few are willing to do it. Those who do pursue violent jihad usually emerge in small groups of action-oriented friends. They come from the same neighborhood and interact during activities, such as soccer or paintball. Often they become camping and hiking companions who learn to take care of one another under trying conditions, which causes them to become even more deeply attached." (16) This sounds a lot like affinity groups. And essentially, Atran considers the jihadist movement as leaderless and structurally not too far from anarchist movements. The point I am trying to make here is: we see that affinity groups work. They have been important in the past from the spanish civil war (17), to blocking coal in the West of Germany (18). They are important in the specific case I looked at and similar forms of organising are even important in a range of different groups and movements.



## Take Aways for Organising



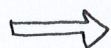
⇒ **0. Get organised in affinity groups** Nobody likes being alone and nobody likes being with a bunch of people that do not care about them. Affinity groups are good for the movement, mainly because they are good for us. The first step for getting organised in affinity groups is awareness that affinity groups even exist. It took me a long time after first hearing of affinity groups as something you have for a specific action, until I found out affinity groups can also be a longer term thing. I was blown away when I saw affinity groups living together, sharing all their money and making each other feel so incredibly at home and loved. Especially when you are new to organising, finding the right people and getting organised as an affinity group can take some time. It does not really make sense to start an affinity group just for the sake of starting one. I cannot really recommend anything on how to find people in the movement you maybe want to start an affinity group with, but I can give some recommendations from my own experience, what others have told me and what I have read, on how to form a stable affinity group from your group of friends. These will only be broad recommendations. Don't take my word for it, they might not work for you at all and there is probably much more better literature and zines on forming affinity groups that I just do not know. But here are my two cents:

- get to know each other well
- learn to take care of each other
- think of where you want to be together in the future, both as an affinity group and also politically
- share. sharing is caring is a boring phrase, but sharing a house, money, clothing and what not can make life a lot easier




⇒ **1. Invest in affinity groups** I mean this not only on an affinity group level. Obviously you should invest time and energy into you affinity group and caring about the people around you. We all know this. What I mean here is: as a collective or movement, we should really take care of affinity groups too. When thinking about making our movement stronger, I usually think about things that are either for individuals (for example activist retreats or movement psychologists) or on a movement level (for example camps, skillshares etc.). Until recently I never really thought about investing directly into affinity groups to make the movement stronger. After thinking and reading a lot about affinity groups over the last year, I realised how much actually depends on solid affinity structures. I am convinced that we can reach



collective and movement outcomes by investing into affinity groups. Looking beyond the horizon of movement organising, we actually see similar things a lot. Teambuilding has become a buzzword in capitalist companies. They send teams of 6-10 people who work together on the same project to some fun activity together, where people learn to trust each other etc. Obviously teams in a company are not affinity groups, but I think actively encouraging affinity groups to do "teambuilding" together, by going on holidays or learning to take care of each other in stressful situations, can help the movement a lot. We can do this both by giving people guidance on how to do that, but also making money available, so people have time to not work and take care of their affinity groups. Camping together, bike trips, or even small things like doing a sneaking game in the forest or building a treehouse together are all things that sound so corny and like teambuilding at capitalist jobs, but they can go a long way in making people comfortable around each other and helping them to learn to take care of each other when times are tough.



**2. Do not hold onto something that is not meant to be** Sometimes the Beatles speak true wisdom. In his song Live and Let Die, Paul McCartney sings:

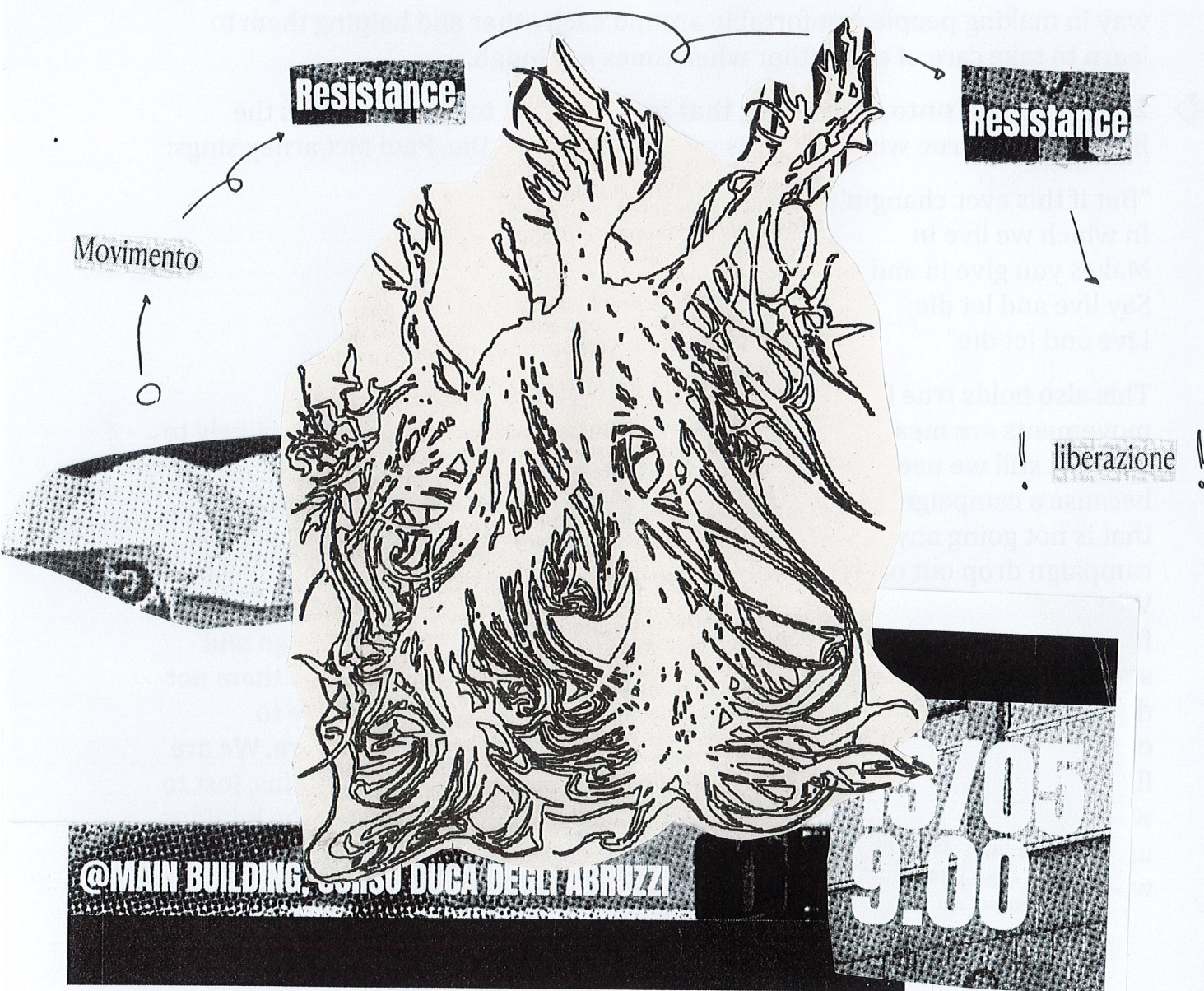
"But if this ever changin' world       
In which we live in  
Makes you give in and cry  
Say live and let die       
Live and let die"     

This also holds true for movements. Too often we forget that not all movements are meant to be. We are used to fighting fights we are not likely to win, but still we need to pick our fights wisely. Becoming frustrated and bitter because a campaign is going nowhere does not get us anywhere. A campaign that is not going anywhere does not always mean people that drop out of the campaign drop out of the movement. They mostly just do something else. What leads to people dropping out of the movement is if they become frustrated, bitter, burnt out because they try to save a failing campaign and start infighting because they are dissatisfied with the people around them not doing "enough" work. We should really think about if it makes sense to organise and if it is not going anywhere, why it is not going anywhere. We are fighting fights that are Sisyphos tasks. We push boulders up mountains, just to watch them roll down again. Or even worse, once we have pushed the boulder up and lift our head from focussing only on this boulder, we see that the whole world is full of boulders waiting to be pushed up mountains. There are not



enough people to push these boulders, and nobody can push them alone anyways. Even if you, as the reader, only take one thing away from this, I want it to be the following: The world is small, and the group of people fighting against oppression and injustice and for liberation is even smaller. Not only in terms of distance but also in terms of numbers. We are fighting an incredible fight and it is cruel and tough to go out against the powerful again and again, but there is no sense in breaking our backs pushing boulders up mountains. We need every single one if we want to have a shot at making this world a more fair and just place for everyone. We need to work together and take care of each other so the boulders do not crush us.

We have to stick together. (19)





## Footnotes and References

I tried to only include references to sources of knowledge that are accessible to everyone. For scientific articles that are often written for experts, people who speak English very well and went to university, I have tried to include another source that explains the same thing in a more accessible way. A lot of the articles, websites and zines I refer to can be found on the internet for free. If not, they can probably be found on <https://annas-archive.org/>. Make sure you use a VPN when downloading from there.

1. Milgram, S. (1967). The small world problem. *Psychology today*, 2(1), 60-67.
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small-world\\_experiment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small-world_experiment)
3. <https://waldstattasphalt.blackblogs.org/en/2021/10/03/troubles-in-danni-critical-reflection-on-dannenroder-forest-occupation/>
4. for example: <http://networksciencebook.com/>
5. see some of the articles/ interviews in: No Mine in Gállok. Ecocide and colonialism in Swedisch-occupied Sápmi
6. one example would be: Full Spectrum Resistance (by Aric McBay), available for free online <https://fullspectrumresistance.org/>
7. another one would be: Glitzer im Kohlestaub (by Kollektiv Zucker im Tank), English translation in the making I heard.
8. not necessarily on occupy wallstreet directly, but more general about collective identity: Hunt, S. A., & Benford, R. D. (2004). Collective identity, solidarity, and commitment. *The Blackwell companion to social movements*, 433(57).
9. Buechler, S. M. (2016). *Understanding social movements: Theories from the classical era to the present*. Routledge. (p. 161)
10. EG even has a page dedicated to their understanding of affinity groups, where they tell you to find them specifically for the action: <https://www.ende-gelaende.org/en/affinity-groups-lusatia/>
11. My definition has high overlap with for example: Day, R. J. (2004). From hegemony to affinity: The political logic of the newest social movements. *Cultural studies*, 18(5), 716-748.
12. If you want to learn R (or any other programming language for that matter) there are a lot of free courses online, for example on <https://datacamp.com>. If you are looking for statnet specific resources they also have a lot on their website <https://statnet.org/>
13. this is a reference to this cartoon: <https://xkcd.com/2347/>, but also very true.



14. If you are interested: <https://web.stanford.edu/~jurafsky/slp3/5.pdf>
15. for example: Maxwell, J. A. (2008). *Designing a qualitative study* (Vol. 2, pp. 214-253). The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods.
16. Atran, S. (2011). Who becomes a terrorist today?. In *The Ethics and Efficacy of the Global War on Terrorism: Fighting Terror with Terror* (pp. 45-58). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.
17. For whom the bell tolls by Ernest Hemmingway is a really interesting novel that follows an anarchist affinity group in the Spanish Civil war. It also shows how hierarchies and patriarchal structures can and often do still develop in these groups
18. See again Glitzer im Kohlestaub, the chapter on phase blockades (Phasenblockade der Nord-Süd Kohlebahn)
19. Apologies for the horrible Cistem Failure reference.



